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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR IZ RO

SUBJECT: MOD STATE SECRETARY: IGNORE THE CAMPAIGN RHETORIC,  
WE'RE FULLY COMMITTED TO STAYING IN IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Nicholas Taubman for 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action message, see Para 4.

¶2. (C) MOD State Secretary Dobritoiu invited the DCM (accompanied by DATT, ODC and Polcouns) for a meeting November 18. His message was simple: "We're all grownups here, please don't get too excited about some of the electoral rhetoric (and media reports) regarding Romania's next steps in Iraq." Dobritoiu noted that comments made by the Defense Minister on the campaign trail regarding the need for contingency planning (for troop withdrawal) if Romania failed to obtain a timely SOFA agreement with Iraq had been distorted by the press.

¶3. (C) Dobritoiu said that the Defense Ministry had drafted a memorandum (which was subsequently approved by Prime Minister Tariceanu and forwarded to the Supreme Defense Council) reiterating Romania's commitment to remain engaged in Iraq beyond the end of the year. The fact that PM Tariceanu was concurrently head of the PNL (and Defense Minister Melescanu a party Vice President) should lay to rest any doubts -- campaign rhetoric notwithstanding -- of the Liberal Party's commitment to staying in Iraq. He added that the Defense Ministry had also requested that the Romanian MFA play a lead role in the "political" process (including negotiations with the Iraqi Government) in assessing the requirements for a new Romanian mission in Iraq and to identify the resource implications of a continued Romanian presence in Iraq next year. Defense Minister Melescanu also planned to hold a small group pull-aside with selected counterparts at upcoming Defense Ministerials in Canada in order to identify common challenges and solutions to remaining in Iraq.

¶4. (C) He said that the GOR's biggest concern was whether the Iraqi Government had the capacity to engage in parallel simultaneous negotiations with Romania and other remaining coalition partners in order to conclude a SOFA before time ran out. Penal jurisdiction was likely to be a sticky point. Dobritoiu acknowledged that time was running out, but added that the government was making contingency plans to streamline the approval process on the Romanian side. Since the Romanian parliament had recessed for the election campaign, any completed bilateral SOFA could be approved by emergency decree pending ex post facto ratification when the next parliament convenes. He said that the MOD was now seized with the issue of what to do if no legal framework is ready by the end of the year, with options including redeployment back to Romania or remaining in-theatre in Kuwait. Both of these options would not be easy, he acknowledged. Dobritoiu said the GOR was also working on plans to reconfigure its current posture in Iraq, including making provision for deploying gendarmerie, police units, and noncombatant assets not covered in the current Supreme Defense Council mandate (which expires in June 2009).

15. (C) Asked where the USG might help, the State Secretary responded with the following:

--The GOR would appreciate USG inputs and lessons learned regarding negotiating with the Iraqis on a SOFA. What should the Romanians expect and what should they watch out for?

--A USG assessment on whether the Iraqis had the capacity to engage in multiple SOFA negotiations with the various troop providing nations would be useful.

--Informal USG help in urging quick Iraqi issuance of the final (as opposed to preliminary) invitation to Romania to keep forces in Iraq would also be appreciated.

--He added that even absent a final invitation, the Romanians want to begin preliminary informal exploratory talks -- not formal negotiations -- to help smooth the way towards formal negotiations. Again, USG help in identifying the appropriate GOI POCs would be helpful.

--Finally, Dobritoiu solicited USG guidance in clarifying what sort of noncombatant assistance package (e.g., police, gendarmes, or other reconstruction assistance) would be most appropriate and useful in Iraq. He underscored that specificity in this area would expedite obtaining quick Supreme Defense Council approval and budgeting for a follow-on mission package.

16. (C) Comment: Dobritoiu's advice regarding the need to disregard the campaign rhetoric (including from his own boss) is appropriate, and his message regarding Romania's continued

commitment to keeping its military forces in Iraq beyond this year is a welcome one. We had heard informally through MOD channels last week that the Defense Ministry had been considering making a pro-forma notification to our side of the possible need to withdraw forces at the end of the year absent a SOFA, UNSCR, or other mandate. However, this proposal was vetoed by President Basescu, who called the Chief of the Defense Staff to insist that the Ministry refrain from doing so. The Romanian side now appears to be united in its desire to stay the course in Iraq, but they will still need to negotiate a SOFA in the short time remaining. Any Department assistance in responding to MOD State Secretary Dobritoiu's para 4 request for USG assistance and guidance would be welcomed by Romanian authorities. End Comment.

TAUBMAN